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Identical letters dated 22 January 2004 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Further to our letters dated 4 and 8 January 2004 concerning the incitement, support, sheltering and training of the outlaw groups by Eritrea in order to destabilize the Sudan and to cripple the ongoing peace process, I have the honour to enclose herewith a news item published by the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) on 16 January 2004 stating that the outlaw groups in the Darfur region (western Sudan) had forged an alliance with the eastern outlaw groups (Beja Congress) as already stated in our letter dated 8 January 2004 referred to above (see annex).

As I put this evidence of the flagrant support provided by Eritrea to terrorist groups before you, I would highly appreciate it if you could kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 156, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Elfatih **Erwa**
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the identical letters dated 22 January 2004 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Sudan: western and eastern rebels forge alliance

Nairobi, 16 January 2004 (Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN))

A rebel movement in the Darfur region of the western Sudan, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), forged an alliance this week with an eastern rebel group, the Beja Congress.

A joint declaration signed on Tuesday stated that both parties would "continue their struggle together until they get rid of marginalization, poverty, ignorance and backwardness". Ali al-Safi, a member of the Central Committee of the Beja Congress, told IRIN from the Eritrean capital, Asmara. "The struggle will continue using all the tools (available) and with close coordination between the two parties", he said.

"It was quiet (in the east), because people were expecting to be included in the Naivasha (Kenya peace) talks", he said. "But from now it will not be quiet. One can expect an escalation of fighting in the east, because the Government is seeking a partial solution (to the Sudan's problems) with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A)."

The Beja Congress campaigned unsuccessfully to take part in negotiations in Kenya between the Government and SPLM/A, which are expected to lead to a peace agreement later this month. It rejected a deal on security arrangements signed by the two sides in October 2003, and shortly afterwards limited skirmishes resumed in the east after a break of several months.

"We think that the international community doesn't intercede unless there are extensive losses of life, such as the 2 million in the southern Sudan. This might be the price that other groups have to pay to get their attention", added al-Safi.

He said the injustices that had provoked the western rebels, SLA, to resort to an armed struggle were essentially the same as those in the east, and that both sides would henceforth present their grievances together as a united front.

Both rebel groups say they are fighting for economic and political power in a federalized Sudan.

A member of SLA in Darfur, Adam Ali Shogar, confirmed that there was an agreement, saying that both groups were "joining in the struggle against the government", and that they were both seeking "peace and equality in the Sudan".

He said their problems concerned the whole of the Sudan and they would fight together if no settlement was reached.

The 2.2 million Beja of the eastern Sudan have been neglected by central Governments for decades, leaving them vulnerable to malnutrition, famine and disease.

The political wing of the Beja Congress had been formed in the 1960s to voice grievances against marginalization of the region, but, frustrated by a lack of progress, had begun an armed struggle by the 1990s.

According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank, Beja frustration reached new heights in the 1990s when Khartoum "aggressively promoted" its version of Islam in the region, launching army attacks on Beja mosques and religious schools, which follow a more tolerant form of Sufi Islam. It also offered some of the most fertile land along the Gash river to government supporters and investors from the Arab Gulf States.

Having joined the opposition umbrella group, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), in 1995, hundreds of Beja were sent to training camps in Eritrea and, together with other NDA armed groups, had started full-scale operations on the eastern front by 1997.

They are currently reckoned to have a few hundred fighters, according to ICG.